

A Different Holiday by Ray Beacham

Where do you go when you love travelling to remote, rarely visited places that offer the tourist magnificent scenery, wonderful wildlife, interesting geological features, diverse nature and cultural history.

The ***Kamchatka Peninsula*** in far Eastern Russia, of course, on the expedition ship “Silversea Explorer”. Expedition cruising is all about experiencing nature, history and culture in remote areas of our wonderful planet. With only 102 passengers and a crew of 119, we were certainly well looked after and enjoyed the experience greatly under the guidance of Brad and his team of lecturers, guides and zodiac drivers. One or two shore excursions via zodiacs each day enables fantastic wildlife experiences, visits to indigenous communities, and rarely visited lakes, rivers and mountains. This provided opportunities for incredible views of spectacle scenery, plants and animals.



Leaving from Petropavlovsk, capital of Kamchatka we visited 11 places up the coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula before arriving in Nome Alaska. Kamchatka has 300 volcanoes of which 30 are active, being part of the “Ring of Fire” at the top end of the Pacific. Petropavlovsk has 5 “pet” volcanoes, which we were lucky to see upon arrival on a lovely sunny day. On a zodiac ride up the Zhupanova river we saw the magnificent Steller Sea Eagle, a Beluga whale, Larcha seals and much birdlife. Two very interesting days were spent out at the Commander Islands in the Bering Sea. These islands are named after the commander Vitus Bering who landed here in 1740 at the end of his voyage of discovery in search of a land bridge between Russia and America for the Tsar. Unfortunately, this is where he and many of his crew died and are buried on a windswept hillside. The village of Tymlat was established as a trading post in the mid-19th century. Today about 500 mostly Koryak people live there, harvesting salmon, herring, caviar, reindeer and marine mammals. They provided us with a great cultural concert of songs and dances.

At Yuzhnaya Glubokaya we walked across tundra meadows covered in wildflowers surrounded by towering, rugged snow-covered mountains. Here we saw several Kamchatka Brown Bears, one with 3 cubs. Bogoslav Is has rugged cliffs which many sea birds use as nesting places. These included Kittiwakes, Horned Puffins and Tufted Puffins, Pelagic Cormorants and Guillemots. At the bottom of the cliffs were several haul outs of walrus. On to Peter Bay and its beautiful glacial lakes set behind moraine ridges and then further north to Yttygran Island just below the Arctic Circle with sunset at 22.11 and sunrise at 2.54. Yttygran offered a unique natural history experience with an array of bowhead whale bones, a place of great archaeological importance combined with natural beauty. Our last stop in Russia was the remote and desolate, outpost seaport of Provideniya. We only anchored off the town to allow Russian custom officials to come aboard for passbook clearance. A most depressing place I cannot image (how lucky we are to live in a wonderful place like Ballarat and Australia).

Departing Provideniya and Kamchatka we headed across the Bering Strait to Nome, Alaska. Here we experienced life in the famous gold mining town and the home of the finishing line of the Iditarod race. Nome had the feeling of a wild west town with a range of buildings and only 3 roads leading out of town. All of which lead nowhere. However, great place to visit with friendly and welcoming people.